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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's new National Policy on Education embodies a specific approach to the Nigerian people's need and and preference for reading in native languages, English, and other languages. This article examines that approach from three perspectives: (1) multilingual, in which the basic education is bilingual (native language and English, with English dominating) but with provision and encouragement for learning other languages; (2) modular, in which the students are treated as either native-language or English-language students but are otherwise educationally homogeneous; and (3) functional, which identifies four purposes for being involved in reading instruction--learning how to read, reading to gain information, reading to survive on one's job, or reading for pleasure, and students are categorized as mature/competent, reluctant/lapsed, or adult/new readers. It proposes these perspectives as a framework for classifying and characterizing readers within the educational system, accurately determining the number of languages and levels at which reading education is needed, and selecting or developing materials for reading instruction. (MSE)

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A MODEL OF NIGERIAN READERSHIP POTENTIALS

DR EBO UBAHAKWE

1.0.0. READING IN MULTILINGUAL SETTING

1.1.0. Reading in Mother Tongue

It has been pointed out (Ubahakwe, 1983) that from the onset of Western education in Nigeria, one unobstrusive and therefore a very pernicious limitation in teaching reading in Nigerian languages lies in teaching them, not as a literary end but as means to other literacy objectives. Underlying the attitude is the tacit assumption that Nigerians need only read ultimately in the target second language of the country. If one considers the number and richness of Nigerian indigenous languages (regrettably believed by some to be a negative factor) and, the opportunities of learning other foreign languages it becomes clear that the means-to-end attitude constitutes a great loss to the readership potentials in Nigeria's multilingual situation. Admittedly, there are difficulties in organizing reading education in a multilingual situation in which some languages dominate others but with good management some of the embedded problems could be turned to great advantage.

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1.2.0. National Policy on Education

The model of readership potentials proposed here is set within Nigeria's new National Policy on Education (NPE) commonly referred to as the 6-3-3-4 system. By the NPE arrangement children who might have gone through a pre-primary educational institution at ages three to five would be admitted to a six-year primary school programme. At the end of the primary education the children then move into a six-year secondary system offered in two equal years of junior and senior secondary.

The junior secondary is both prevocational and academic while the senior secondary is comprehensive. Those who drop out of the system at the end of the junior secondary could go into some apprenticeship. Senior secondary education on the other hand could lead either straight to the university or tortuously through teacher and technical institutions

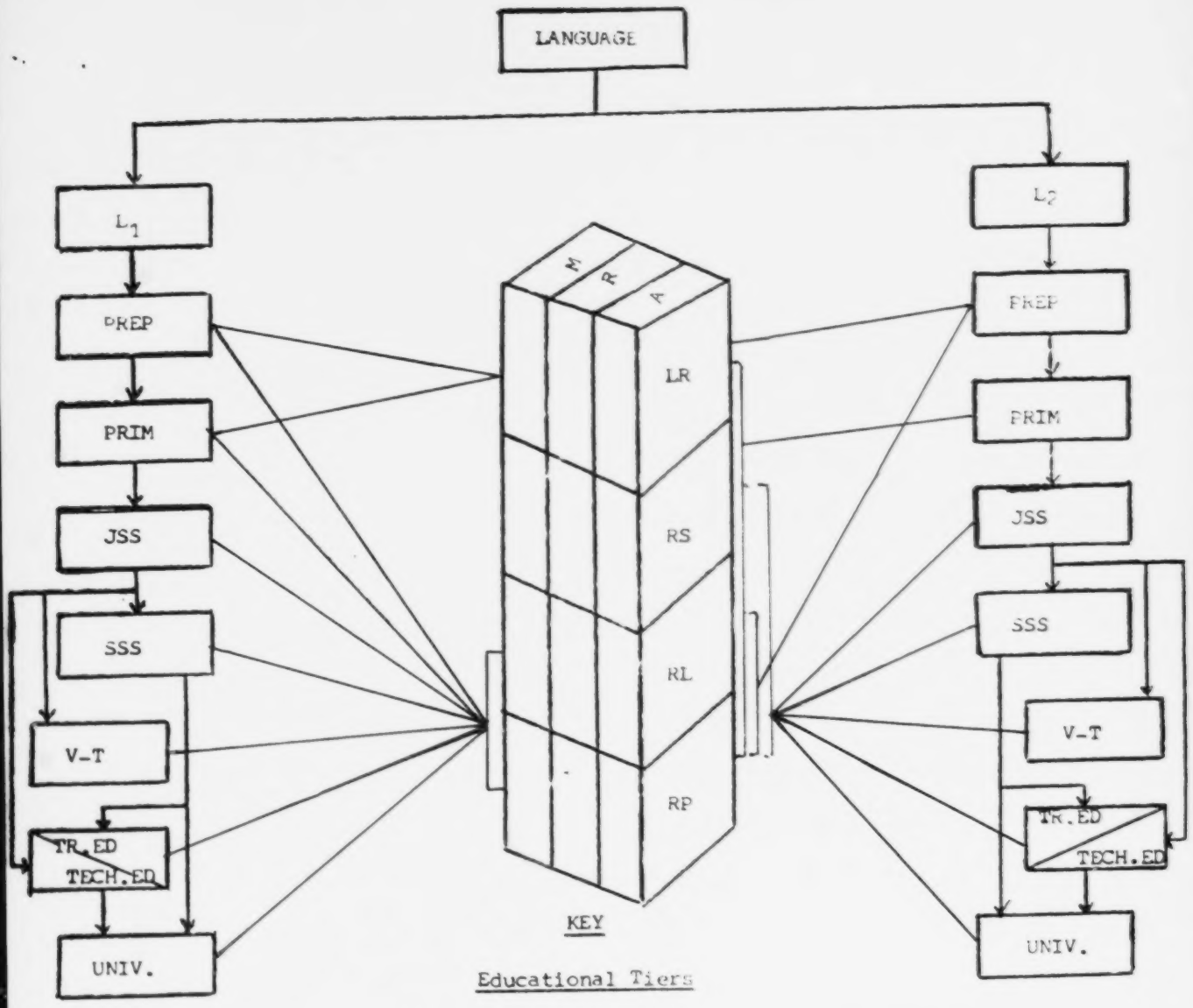
The over-all educational objectives of the NPE are stated as the inculcation of national consciousness and unity, appropriate values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and society, training the mind to understand the world around and the acquisition of appropriate skills to enable individuals live effectively in the society. The new educational system came into force in September, 1982 in Federal Colleges and three years later in 1985 in the rest of the State schools

1.3.0. Objectives of the Paper

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the Nigerian readership potentials which has been conceptualized diagramatically (Fig.1) within the NPE system. The potentials are discussed from the three perspectives of multi-lingual, modular, and functional readerships.

2.0.0. A MODEL OF NIGERIAN READERSHIP POTENTIALS.

FIG.1. Model of Nigerian Readership Potential: Context 1



CONTEXT I = L_2 dominates L_1

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2.1.0. Multilingual Readership

In recognition of the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, NPE states that:

a. the language of instruction at the pre-primary and primary levels should be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and only later English is to be so used at the primary school.

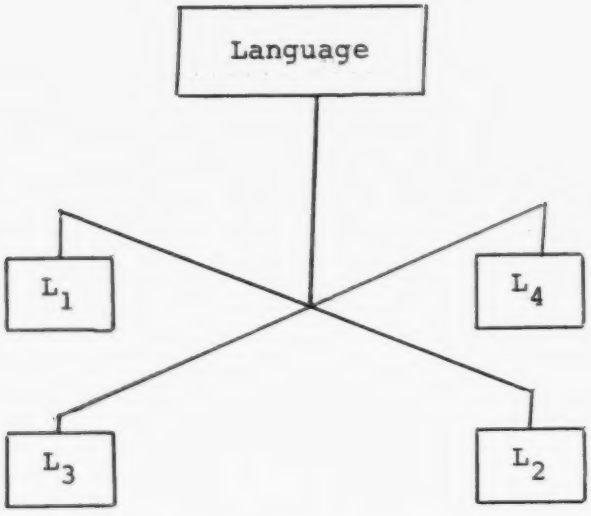
b. children should be encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than the child's mother tongue

c. French and arabic are electives at the secondary level.

d. permanent literacy is one of the general objectives of primary education.

From the above, NPE is built on multilingual education and, for our immediate purpose, on multilingual readership. The model of readership postulated here reflects a bilingual readership. The indigenous and foreign language options deliberately left out in fig.1 can easily be accommodated in the model by simply adding as many language arms as desired (fig.2) with appropriate modifications on the reading purpose.

Fig. 2. Flexible Language Options



The bilingual in fig.1 refers to a child who, according to NPE, should be educated both in his first language (L_1) and in English as a second language (L_2). This means that the products of NPE should be able to read in L_1 for a variety of specified purposes right up to the highest educational ladder attained by the individual. Similarly they should be able to read in English (L_2) again for specified purposes at any given level of education.

It should be pointed that the bilingual model (fig.1) describes a language contact situation in which L_2 dominates L_1. This means that, for all practical purposes, the products of the system (at any point beyond the primary school level) would read better in L_2 than in L_1. Other language contact situations in which:

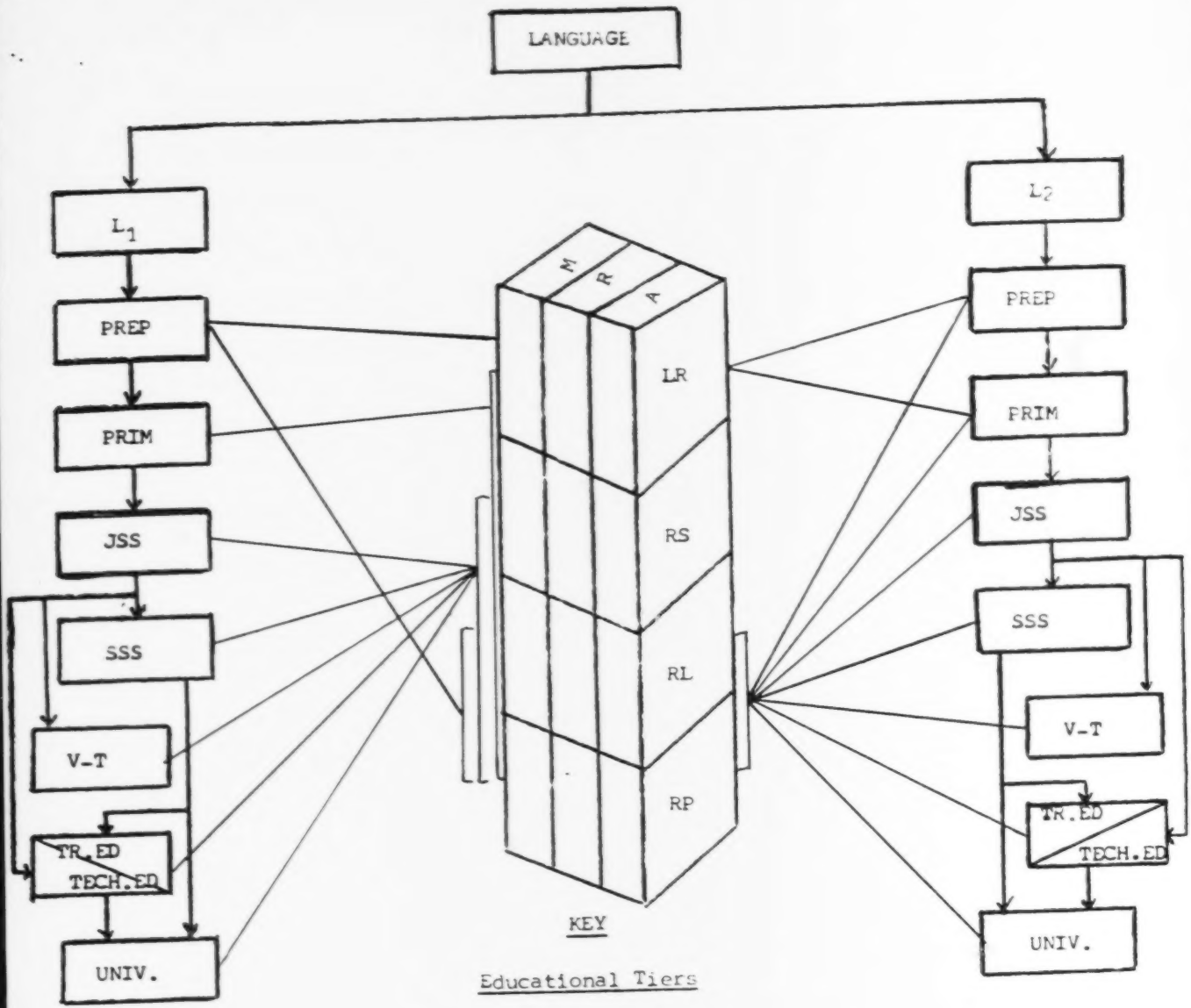
(a) L_1 dominates L_2,

(b) L_1 and L_2 are balanced are represented in figs. 3 and 4 respectively.

2.2.0. Modular Readership

By modular readership is meant an educationally homogeneous group who belong to one or other of the eight educational tiers of the National Policy on Education marked in L_1 and L_2 arms (Fig. 1) as: Prep., Prim., JSS, V-T, SSS, Tr. Ed., Tech. Ed., Univ. The homogeneity of educational background, as used here, does recognize the cognitive and personality differences discussed below under readership quality.

FIG. 3. Model of Nigerian Readership Potential: Context II



KEY

Languages

L_1 = First Language
L_2 = Second Language

Readers

M = Mature reader
R = Reluctant reader
A = Adult/New reader

Educational Tiers

PREP = Preprimary
PRIM = Primary
JSS = Junior Secondary
SSS = Senior Secondary
V-T = Vocational Technical
TR.ED = Teacher Education
TECH. ED = Technical Education
UNIV. = University

Reading Functions

LR = Learning to read
RS = Reading to survive
RL = Reading to learn
RP = Reading for pleasure

CONTEXT II = L_1 dominates L_2

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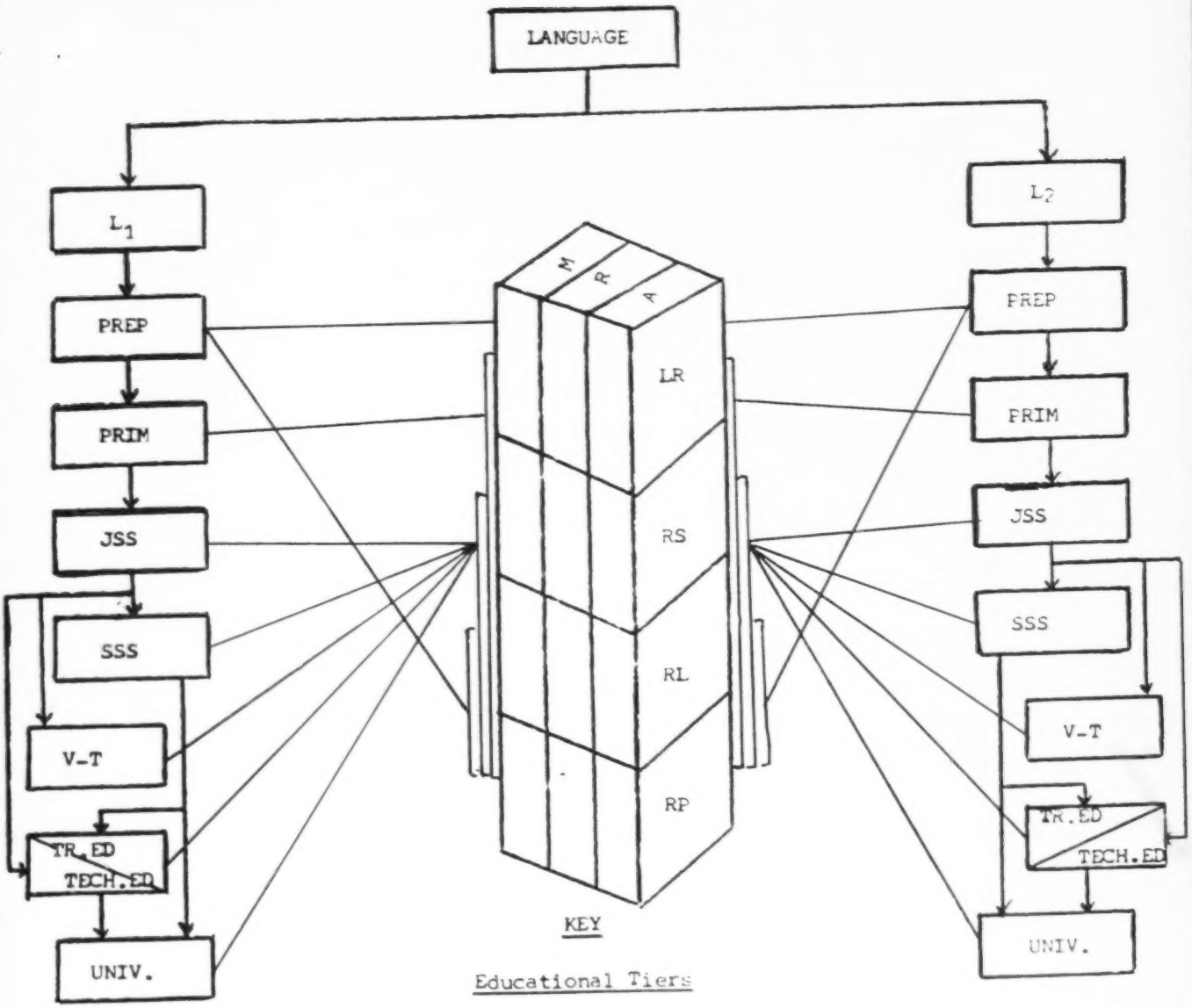
FIG.4. Model of Nigerian Readership Potential: Context III



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RP = Reading for pleasure

CONTEXT III = $L_1 \rightleftharpoons L_2$ i.e. Balanced Bilingual

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2.3.0. Functional Readership

Functional readership refers to the purpose for which the reading is undertaken. In our model, four of such purposes are identified. Some overlapping may, of course, exist among the four groupings but the classifications at least indicate primary emphasis.

2.3.1. Learning to Read: the new-comer, of whatever age, who is being introduced for the first time into the art of reading the printed word by noting the sound-symbol relationship is learning to read.

2.3.2. Reading to Learn: one who reads to learn history, geography, science, or whatever, is reading to learn. The reading here is seen as a means to an end, a tool in the education process. Included here too is all forms of reading for general information/education both in and out of school e.g. the reading of newspapers and notices.

2.3.3. Reading to Survive: the lawyer who wades through all the relevant law reports in order to prepare his case, the business executive who studies various types of reports and forecasts in order to take the right investment decision, all who take professional decisions after studying and analysing relevant data, the village farmer whose crop yield depends on his ability to read, for example, the directions on how to apply the fertilizer or insecticides in his farm, all of them are reading in order to survive. Other instances of reading to survive include all job-specific or job-oriented readings both in and out of school contexts as in the process of learning a trade, reading involved in the process of complying with the law or securing an advantage as in the reading of road and traffic signs, reading and filling tax, insurance and application forms.

2.3.4. Reading for Pleasure: it refers to the recreational reading done at lesiure hours for entertainment and relaxation in addition to or in place of watching the TV or drinking at the club etc.

2.4.0. Readership Quality: Taken together with the functional readership is that quality of readership by which people are classified as either mature/competent, reluctant/lapsed, or adult/new readers. Mature Readers are those who benefit from their reading experiences at any stage of reading exposure while Reluctant Readers are those, for reasons not necessarily their fault are inefficient readers and therefore fail, at any point, to keep up their reading skill and interest. The Adult/New Readers either missed the opportunity of early literacy or dropped out at one stage but later on realized the need and then went for it with zeal.

The kind of reader one is, and one's purpose in reading are represented in tbe block at the centre (figs. 1, 3, 4). The top of the block is marked M(= mature), R(= reluctant), and A(= adult new) readers while the vertical side of the block is marked LR(= learning to read),

RL(= reading to learn), RS(=reading to survive) and RP(=reading for pleasure). Solid lines relate modular readership to all possible functions of reading postulated for that level.

3.0.0. APPLICATION OF READERSHIP POTENTIALS

The model of the Nigerian readership potentials described here presents in one composite and graphic picture the many levels of readers, the quality of reading and their purposes in reading at each level of educational tiers as well as the languages in which the reading is done. The model also specifies the linguistic contexts in terms of the direction of linguistic dominance of the bilinguals and the influence of the linguistic contexts on the reading purpose.

Emerging from the model described above are three important contributions to, and insight into, the reading curriculum in Nigeria. First,

we can now infer more precisely who our readers are by classifying and partially characterizing them. For example, the chronological age range of the readers are precisely known, leaving only the maturational variations to individual differences; the cognitive characteristics and potentials of the readers are fairly predictable based on the educational levels of attainment; and especially relevant, the reading goals and competence can be identified and classified for each group of readers among the educational tiers. We can see as an illustration (table 1) the distribution of readers (and their goals in reading) in a second language (L_2) and in a linguistic context in which L_2 dominates L_1. In the same way table 2 provides similar information for the mother tongue (L_1) and in the same linguistic context. From tables 1&2 (derived from fig.1) we have a total of 38 (22+6) specific reading audiences with known basic characteristics.

Table 1: Readership Range in L2: Context I

Readers	Reading Purposes				Total
	LR	RS	RL	RP	
Prep	1		1	1	3
Prim	1	1	1	1	4
JSS		1	1	1	3
SSS		1	1	1	3
V-T		1	1	1	3
Tr/Tech. Ed.		1	1	1	3
Univ.		1	1	1	3
Total	2	6	7	7	22

LR = Learning to read
RS = Reading for survival
RL = Reading to Learn
RP = Reading for pleasure

Table 2: Readership Range in L1: Context I

Readers	Reading Purposes				Total
	LR	RS	RL	RP	
Prep	1		1	1	3
Prim	1		1	1	3
JSS			1	1	2
SSS			1	1	2
V-T			1	1	2
Tr/Tech. Ed			1	1	2
Univ.			1	1	2
Total	2	--	7	7	16

Similar calculations can be done with precision for the two other linguistic contexts in which (a) L_1 dominates L_2 (fig. 3) and (b) L_1 balances L_2 i.e. balanced bilingual (fig. 4).

Secondly, it can be determined accurately the number of languages in which the reading is to be carried out as well as the kinds of readers and potential levels of reading attainment for the different educational tiers which the society, through its educational philosophy, demands of the products of the system. The goals of the 6-3-3-4 system, for example includes permanent literacy which in practice means either permanent literacy in L_2 and possibly in L_1 (fig.1); permanent literacy in L_1 and possibly in L_2 (fig. 3); or permanent literacy in both L_1 and L_2 (fig. 4) depending upon the prevalent linguistic context of the educational system. It follows that from tables 1 and 2 and from similar tables that could be derived from figs 3 & 4, we can estimate the potential number of readers who could acquire permanent literacy in L_1, in L_2 and permanent but not necessarily

balanced blingual readers in L_1 and L_2. It is clear, however, that the dominant linguistic context in Nigeria, for now, is as reflected in fig.1 to which such readership predictions may have to be restricted.

Thirdly, if the classifications rather than characterizations of the audience are known, not so much as persons as readers, and if the languages in which they read and the depth of such a reading are also known, then the quality and nature of the matter to be read can also be determined. In other words, writers of texts (for those learning to read, reading to survive, reading to learn) and novels or story books (reading for pleasure, reading to learn) can aim at their audience more precisely and write to catch them. This observation is particularly important in the third world countries like Nigeria where readers are taken (usually dragged) to books unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the developed world where books are taken (flow perhaps) to the readers. The polar tension between readers and books in countries like Nigeria

arises not only because the books are scarce but also and mainly because the books are unsuitable. With such clarifications as outlined above writers of merit (no less than writers in need) beginning sometimes, if not frequently, with an ill-defined audience in view and almost always struggling to buy time for their craft, can be saved that which they need most for the mutual benefit of all.

4.0.0. Conclusion

Curriculum planning is normally concerned with establishing how best to relate fields of knowledge to the learner within the context of the prevailing circumstances of the learner's society (Yoloye, 1980). The process of attaining this goal is usually set in five phases of identifying aims and objectives, the choice of content, selection of learning experiences, the organization of the learning experiences and content, and the evaluation of the process itself (Wheeler, 1980). An attempt was made in this paper to

contribute a theoretical input into the design of a reading curriculum. A broad framework was established for identifying and characterizing the reader and setting him in a specific educational context. The discussion was then restricted to aspects of the first two phases of the curriculum process namely the objectives and content. There is, of course, a big gulf between the theoretical conception of the objectives and content, on the one hand, and the burden of creating a reading public in a multilingual situation. This latter task has been undertaken against the background of the model offered in this paper by the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN). Through workshops and commissioned writing RAN is tackling the remaining three phases of the curriculum process: creating the learning experiences, suggesting the teaching-learning organizational structure and evaluative procedure. Under this scheme, RAN Monograph Series titled Learning to Read and Reading to Learn edited by Ebo Ubahakwe and S O Unoh respectively are already in print. It is therefore hoped that the rich reading potentials in Nigeria's multilingual situation would be fully explored and exploited.

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